

DCA13MR002
Conrail - Shared Assets
Derailment/Hazardous Material Release
Paulsboro, New Jersey
November 30, 2012

NTSB - Interview of Officer_2, Paulsboro Police Department

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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Investigation of: *

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TRAIN DERAILMENT/CHEMICAL SPILL *

NOVEMBER 30, 2012

* Docket No.: DCA-13-MR-002

PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY *

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Interview of: NICOLE THIGPEN

Paulsboro Police Department
Paulsboro, New Jersey

Sunday,
December 2, 2012

The above-captioned matter convened, pursuant to notice.

BEFORE: PAUL STANCIL
Accident Investigator

APPEARANCES:

PAUL STANCIL, Accident Investigator
Office of Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous
Materials Investigations
National Transportation Safety Board
490 L'Enfant Plaza East, S.W.
Washington, D.C.

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I N T E R V I E W

(10:35 a.m.)

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2
3 MR. STANCIL: Today is December 2nd, 2012. It's
4 approximately 10:35 a.m. We are at the Paulsboro Police
5 Department conference room. My name is Paul Stancil. I'm a
6 Hazardous Materials Accident Investigator for the National
7 Transportation Safety Board. Today we are interviewing Officer
8 Nicole --

9 OFFICER THIGPEN: Thigpen.

10 MR. STANCIL: -- Thigpen. Could you spell your last
11 name, please?

12 OFFICER THIGPEN: T-h-i-g-p-e-n.

13 MR. STANCIL: Okay.

INTERVIEW OF NICOLE THIGPEN

14
15 BY MR. STANCIL:

16 Q. You're an officer involved in patrol or --

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Could you explain what your functions are here?

19 A. Patrol Officer. Been here for 6 years, since August
20 14th, 2006.

21 Q. Great. I understand that you were amongst the first
22 responders to the railroad accident here in Paulsboro. I would
23 ask you just give us a narration describing what you did and saw
24 from the time you responded to the scene, please.

25 A. Okay. I was -- I worked the night before, 7 to 7, and I

1 hadn't left the station yet when the call came out. And the first
2 officer that got out there was Rodney Richards, and he must've
3 come on the radio immediately and said that there was a severe
4 emergency out there. And he was asking for the sergeants to
5 respond and I believe he even said me, also, because he saw how
6 bad it was.

7 I grabbed the keys to the car. I went out and I drove
8 down East Washington Street out to Commerce and made a left. And
9 as I got a little bit closer I could see just this cloud. I could
10 see the red flashing lights from the two cop cars and they were
11 engulfed in the cloud.

12 I stopped where the block would be, and they were down
13 by the railroad tracks. And I started yelling for them. And Jen
14 Zubic -- Officer Zubic had come out of the cloud and she told me
15 to start knocking on doors and telling people to get out. And I
16 was yelling at her, you guys need to get out of there; what, you
17 know, what is it? She said, we don't know.

18 So I started knocking on doors that were right there,
19 telling people that there's been an emergency, an accident, and
20 you need to get out of your house. And as I come down South Walk
21 there is Jefferson. I started going down that street. There's
22 two houses down there that have residents. The first was the
23 elder Mr. Stevenson. And when I went to run across the street to
24 Gary Stevenson's house he was out in the yard with a radio and
25 binoculars. And in his yard you could see what happened. And I

1 have a picture of him saying on the radio, write down this placard
2 number, you know, we have to find out what it is. And I ran down
3 to him and I said, can you see it? You know, because he had
4 binoculars. And he said, I can only see the one number, he said,
5 and it's -- I didn't understand what he meant. He said something-
6 chloride. And I said, well, should we be standing here, then?
7 And he said, not really, but we're here. So I ran back down
8 Jefferson Street and started knocking on more doors down Commerce
9 Street telling people to leave.

10 I don't know how much time had gone by and they told us
11 to -- more units, different towns, everyone started coming in.
12 And they -- I probably got down to Adams and Commerce. And I had
13 told -- I was told, then, to start telling people to stay in their
14 house and not leave, to go back and tell everybody to stay in the
15 house and not leave. So we tried -- we went and told everybody
16 that was there -- some people actually did get in their cars and
17 were able to get out of the area.

18 I was told not too long after that -- the county was
19 asking me, you know, where do you want these officers? Where do
20 you want incident command to be? And they said the firehouse,
21 which is on Thompson and Swedesboro. And Sergeant Grey told me to
22 over there, that he was making me in charge. So I must've been
23 down around the -- where the actual incident happened for, I don't
24 know, it felt like a half hour, but it could've been 15, 20
25 minutes.

1 And then I responded to the fire hall and I would just
2 tell them on the radio, "I got six guys here. Where do you want
3 them?" And they would start saying, you've got to block off here,
4 here, and here. And I would tell them how to get there and just
5 to keep it blocked off, don't let anybody through. I just kept
6 doing that.

7 Everybody that came, the FBI, all -- everybody, they
8 were all told to come there first and then I told them they had to
9 go down to the St. James Church. And a couple of them didn't want
10 to go because they said, well, where did this happen? I said,
11 probably within 1,000 feet from there. And a couple of them said
12 they didn't want to go. And I said, well, I don't know when these
13 people are coming back here. That's where they are; they're in a
14 church right over there.

15 Jan Zubec had told me later that there was people that
16 had got there and said, well, we're retreating; we've leaving;
17 we're not staying here.

18 And I stayed there until noon. I didn't leave until
19 almost noon. Where we were standing you could see -- you look
20 down Wood Street and it's 2 blocks and the creek is there. And a
21 couple of detectives from the Prosecutor's Office -- I believe
22 they're in the Warrants Unit -- they -- we were standing, we were
23 watching it.

24 Not too long after we first got there you could see the
25 cloud over the creek, and it didn't look -- you could just see it

1 above the creek. Not too much time went by and it just kept
2 rising up very high and then it started coming our way. And there
3 was a stop sign that we could see, that we could no longer see.
4 It probably came up at least a whole block, which would encompass,
5 like, the whole block of East Wood Street. And it was just very
6 tall and -- they -- someone else there had said again vinyl
7 chloride and I said, that sounds like what they said. And they
8 got out one of their hazmat books. I didn't have my bag. I had
9 brought it in, so I didn't have any of that stuff with me. And
10 they were reading off, you know, how dangerous it was.

11 And I just kept sending people where they asked for them
12 and answering questions. People would ask and I would answer. We
13 only had, like, three people come to the firehouse that, like,
14 retreated from their home and sat there, like, the whole day. I
15 remember telling kids to go back home, not go to school, stuff
16 like that.

17 And that's pretty much -- because I was there until
18 almost noon when I was relieved.

19 Q. Going back to when you first went down, how long after
20 the initial call came in did you arrived on-scene?

21 A. Maybe a full minute.

22 Q. Okay. So you were very soon after the first two?

23 A. Yes.

24 Q. The first two were who?

25 A. Rodney Richards and Jan Zubec. The two sergeants -- the

1 sergeant that worked with me all night, he made it out there, too.
2 They were, like, right in front of me, Sergeant Grey and Sergeant
3 Gilcrest.

4 Q. Okay. So the three of you arrived simultaneously?

5 A. Yeah. And before I had been sent to the fire hall I had
6 saw Sergeant Gilcrest and then I saw him down by Gary Stevenson's
7 house. And every time Rodney was getting on the radio I could
8 hear him coughing. He just kept coughing because he was in it.
9 He was in it for the longest from what I understand.

10 Q. Were you in it?

11 A. Yeah. I was running to houses, knocking on houses.

12 Q. So you were in the vapor cloud?

13 A. Yeah. Not up by the train track on Commerce but down by
14 the river or the creek. I mean, you could see it. You could see
15 a haze and it just kept going.

16 Q. And how long after you arrived did you go to speak with
17 Deputy Chief Stevenson?

18 A. It was probably 4 minutes or so, however long it would
19 take me to knock on about four houses before I was going to his.

20 Q. Okay. So he was amongst the homes that you were
21 knocking on --

22 A. Um-hum.

23 Q. -- doing the door-to-door evacuation?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. Let's talk again about what he was doing when you got

1 there.

2 A. He had his portable, his radio, and he had binoculars,
3 and he was hold both of them and he was saying stuff on the radio.
4 And I was asking him what was it or, you know, can you see it with
5 the binoculars? And he said, I can only see one placard. And
6 when he said -- I mean, it was like the chloride. And I'm
7 thinking of like chlorine.

8 I worked in a chemical plant before. Like, I know you
9 won't survive that. If you live -- if there's a cloud, you won't
10 survive it if it's coming your way. And I said, should we be
11 standing here? And he said, probably not, but we're already here.
12 And I maybe was with him 30, 45 seconds, but I didn't stay because
13 my mission was to keep knocking on doors and tell them to leave.

14 Q. So he indicated that he was going to stay?

15 A. He didn't retreat with me. He -- you know, I don't know
16 if he was trying to see what else or -- I mean, he had big
17 binoculars and his radio.

18 Q. Where was he on his property?

19 A. All the way against the creek, as far as you could get
20 to it. There is a sign or something there. It was near the sign.

21 Q. Did he offer you any advice about the chemical at all?

22 A. No.

23 Q. Okay. Did -- you mentioned that there was a change in
24 the evacuation order. Initially it was door-to-door and then it
25 was shelter in place.

1 A. Um-hum.

2 Q. When and how did that come about?

3 A. They said it over the radio. I don't know if it was
4 Sergeant Grey or Rodney, but they'd said it over the radio, to
5 tell people to stay -- that not to go, to stay. Close their
6 doors, their windows and just stay inside.

7 Q. Do you know anything about what that decision was based
8 upon?

9 A. I don't know if it was they'd gotten an answer to the
10 placard or -- because they were saying it was propane and this
11 chloride stuff.

12 Q. And who was saying this?

13 A. It was coming over the radio. So I don't know if they
14 were talking to -- I remember him saying they were trying to get
15 the manifest from the train operator so they could say, and then
16 at one point they put out the most volatile stuff was 27 cars
17 down. And I heard later it was, like, six or seven cars down.

18 Q. Did you have any contact with train crew or any --

19 A. No, not at all.

20 Q. -- other industry representatives who responded?

21 A. No. Not with the train crew, but anybody that came to
22 the firehouse because that's where they were told to go. I just
23 directed them. I made sure that they were who they said they were
24 and it wasn't just, you know -- because they were going to have to
25 go through probably three checkpoints before they could get there.

1 Q. Right.

2 A. So I made sure they were who they said they were and
3 sent them on their way. And I would tell them over the radio, you
4 got so-and-so coming.

5 Q. You mentioned that several individuals refused to go
6 down there. Do you know --

7 A. They eventually went. I mean -- well, they left me, so
8 -- but there was a couple and they were, like, why are they down
9 there? I said, I don't know. They told me this was incident
10 command. The sergeant told me to come here and direct people and
11 they've stayed down there.

12 Q. Who expressed that concern to you?

13 A. I can't even remember because I didn't write anybody's
14 name down. There was a couple. The one might've been a doctor
15 from the hospital, that he -- I've seen him run with the crews
16 before, but I don't know what capacity, just he was here. I
17 forget his name because I had people asking me, you know, why are
18 they down there?

19 I had a Washington Township -- I believe he was fireman
20 -- tell me -- at one point he said, I don't know if anybody down
21 there knows, but there was 18 of our guys on a boat in the creek
22 and now they're down at -- he said the old Ames. I said, the old
23 Ames? He said, that old grocery store down there. I said, the
24 old Acme? And he said, yeah, because they're waiting for
25 ambulances to take them to the hospital.

1 I had the fire chief of Washington Township I've known
2 for a few years, he sent me a message on Facebook and he said they
3 were not in a boat on the creek. And I'm like, well, then why did
4 your guy come up to me in all of this and tell me that? He said,
5 I pretty much have an idea of who it would be, but -- so I don't
6 know where they were, but I believe that they -- he was accurate
7 in the amount of people that went and that they were firemen.

8 Q. The incident command post was set up at St. James
9 Church?

10 A. I was told to go to the firehouse and that that was
11 going to be incident command and then they started telling me to
12 send them down there. But they had asked -- I believe it might
13 have been Glenn Roemmich. Someone had asked for our town watch
14 guy to come down because he is in charge of that church, like, I
15 guess, the maintenance, stuff like that. And they asked for
16 county to get a hold of him so that he would come down and open
17 the church for them.

18 Q. How did it come that church was chosen as the --

19 A. I have not a clue. I wasn't there when that decision
20 was made. I was at the firehouse.

21 Q. Did anyone voice any concerns about that other than the
22 visitors that would arrive?

23 A. Like afterwards or --

24 Q. Your department, Fire Department.

25 A. Yeah, I'd asked a couple of people why did that happen.

1 They said, it wasn't our choice. It was Office of Emergency
2 Management choice. It was the OEM, the county OEM that decided to
3 make that the incident command. And from what I've been trained
4 and what I understand, is that as a scene progresses and you find
5 out more of what it is -- like we won't even be in charge of
6 something like this. It's going to be someone that's more
7 qualified. Someone that's got hazmat training, that knows that
8 these chemicals are.

9 Someone in fire -- like we kind of understand that fire
10 will take over -- fire personnel will take over in scenes like
11 this and that we're just there to supplement and help. I mean,
12 they're supposed to know a lot more about it and that's why they
13 take over. So I mean, you know, the chief of police could be
14 answering to them even if he's the chief of police. You're going
15 to do what they say to do.

16 Q. And you mentioned someone was consulting a hazmat book.

17 A. Yes.

18 Q. Tell me a little bit about that.

19 A. It was one of the little orange hazmat books, and
20 someone there had said that they had heard it was vinyl chloride
21 and they looked it up. And there was, like, a stable and unstable
22 and they were reading both of them.

23 Q. Who was consulting the book?

24 A. Phil Dieser from the Sheriff's Department.

25 Q. Is that the county sheriff?

1 A. Yeah, the Gloucester County Sheriff's Department.

2 Q. And how long into the incident was this?

3 A. That was after I had been at the firehouse for maybe 20
4 minutes or so, half an hour.

5 Q. Oh, so this was back at the firehouse?

6 A. Yes, this was after I had gotten to the firehouse.

7 Q. And what did you learn from looking at the hazmat book?

8 A. They said it's -- I think it said it was Level 8
9 carcinogen. It attacks your liver. It displaces the oxygen in
10 your lungs. Symptoms were, like, blurry eyes, dizziness, nausea,
11 sore throat or chest pains. I've had a sore throat and headaches
12 ever since that day. I haven't had the chest pains or anything
13 like that.

14 Q. After consulting the book did anyone change the way the
15 operation was being handled on-scene?

16 A. Not that I know of. For a while there Glenn Roemmich
17 and the man that they made the spokesperson that they put on
18 camera, who was John Burzichelli -- they were in a firewall for a
19 while, in the office, and then they just -- they had left at some
20 point because I had news reporters showing up and everything, and
21 they were told that John Burzichelli was going to give them a
22 statement, you know, put it out, tell people what to do, stay
23 inside, don't go out and stuff like that. And when I went looking
24 for him he wasn't in there. And a couple of the volunteer fire
25 personnel that were in there said, oh, they left. So I'm under

1 the understanding that they went out to St. James Church and then
2 they all came back much later.

3 Q. And this is after consulting the hazmat book?

4 A. They weren't there.

5 Q. Oh, they weren't there when --

6 A. No, they weren't there. If they were there, they were
7 inside. They weren't outside with us.

8 Q. And did -- Mr. Dieser, what's his position with the
9 Gloucester County Sheriff? Is he --

10 A. Oh, he's just a -- he's just a sheriff's officer.

11 Q. Sheriff?

12 A. Yeah, he ran for sheriff.

13 Q. Oh, he's the sheriff?

14 A. No. He ran for sheriff. He didn't -- he wasn't
15 elected, but he -- he might be a sergeant, but I'm not sure.

16 Q. Do you know if he attempted to convey this information
17 to anyone?

18 A. I don't know. I do know, like, they -- I know he had
19 left and I didn't see him again.

20 Q. Going back to when you first saw cloud --

21 A. Um-hum.

22 Q. -- describe to me how large the cloud was, how it was
23 moving, how tall was it.

24 A. When I first pulled up I saw the cloud -- it had
25 encompassed pretty much both of the patrol cars. Rodney's was all

1 the way up near Madison. And the train wasn't all the way across
2 the track, the engine wasn't, and his car was up about here, where
3 the train was, almost right in front of it. And Jen's car was
4 maybe two car lengths behind him at the most. And the cloud -- I
5 could still see the rear end of her car, but basically all I could
6 see were the flashing lights that they had turned on.

7 It looked like it was moving left, from my view. I'm
8 looking up North Commerce and it looked like it was moving left.
9 And then it's like as I looked it just looked fainter where I was
10 and went down Jefferson Street. When I went down to, like, Adams
11 I didn't see it. You could see it laying over the creek really
12 good. But they -- when I first got there, that was the first
13 thing that scared me, was -- I didn't know if maybe it was smoke
14 from, like, a fire, you know. And I kept asking Jen, what is it;
15 what is it? She goes, we don't know yet. I said, well, then we
16 shouldn't be in it. So -- but it just -- it looked like a gray
17 cloud just moving.

18 And then when I went down to the firehouse you could see
19 -- you could see it was -- from that distance it looked like there
20 was, like, an inch over the creek, you know, and then it just --
21 it went -- in 15 minutes it went 10 feet taller that we could see
22 and then it started coming towards us. It came down a whole
23 block. You couldn't see the two stop signs.

24 Q. How far into town did it come?

25 A. Well, I never left there until about noon, so I don't

1 know if it, you know, would've gone down the whole creek and then
2 come across. I don't know if it -- if you could see it on 295. I
3 couldn't tell you. But, I mean, I would assume that if Wood
4 Street had the cloud coming across it, so did New and maybe those
5 houses there right across from the creek.

6 Q. You mentioned you're experiencing some symptoms from the
7 exposure. Is that --

8 A. Yeah. Well, I had jaw surgery on the 15th and I'm on
9 Naproxen that the doctor prescribed me and I still have a
10 headache, so -- I didn't have it before. And I have -- it's like
11 a weird sore throat. It's not like sick, like I'm getting a cold.
12 It's like -- I don't know -- like I drank or ate something and it
13 irritated my throat.

14 Q. Did you seek any medical attention for this?

15 A. No. I was tested yesterday, but other than that I'm --
16 is there anything that they can do for me? I mean I --

17 Q. I suppose it depends on the results of your test, how
18 severe the exposure was.

19 As far as any training in hazardous materials response,
20 what's the extent of the training you've received?

21 A. They go over -- we've had a couple little computer
22 things we would do on a computer years ago that talked about
23 different hazardous material, like what to do and scenarios.
24 That's about incident command and how you keep relinquishing it to
25 someone with more experience. I mean, I know that you're supposed

1 to be -- I don't know how many feet -- I wouldn't pass that test
2 if you put it in front of me, but I know you're supposed to be a
3 certain amount of feet upwind from whatever it is that you're
4 dealing with. And if the wind shifts and it's coming your way,
5 then you've got to move. I mean, I do remember that. And I don't
6 know how many feet it is, but I'm sure it's more than, like,
7 1,000. I mean I don't know if it's a half a mile, a mile, but I'm
8 sure where they were was not where you should be.

9 Q. And on the morning of the accident you were duty-bound
10 to respond to the residents --

11 A. Yeah.

12 Q. -- and expose yourself to this cloud?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. I don't want to put words in your mouth. Tell me --

15 A. No. I was.

16 Q. Tell me --

17 A. I mean, I had clocked out and I -- if I didn't have to
18 wait for the printer to type something out, I may have been out of
19 the door because when I clocked out it was 7:07. And it was,
20 like, right when I clocked out. I was waiting for something to
21 print. We have a printer down there -- it's brand new, but it
22 takes forever to print something. And I had to print a letter and
23 give it to the captain. And as soon as I clocked out and I heard
24 Rodney -- I mean, I go that way to go home, so I mean if it wasn't
25 anything that bad I would've stopped and been, like, you guys

1 okay? But as soon as he started yelling I just went and grabbed
2 the keys, grabbed my portable out of my little filing cabinet down
3 there and I ran out the door. I mean it's, it's -- I know it
4 sounds stupid, but it's almost like I had no option. I picked
5 this job. I know that stuff happens. I'm not going to leave
6 people. I'm not. I'm not going to abandon my post. It's a
7 shame, but that's what it is. It's like somebody's got to do it.

8 Q. Do you feel that additional training would be
9 beneficial, equipment? What do you feel that you need to protect
10 yourself in the future for something like this?

11 A. Well, I had a gas mask when I worked at Packo (ph.).
12 And, I mean, we're here -- there's refineries all around us. I
13 mean, I think we should at least have gas masks issued to us, you
14 know, and to be trained for them. We used to do drills when I
15 worked at Packo. You'd put your gas mask on and you would shoot,
16 you know, down at the range so that you knew what it felt like if
17 the time came and you needed to do that. We did all kinds of
18 stuff. I don't have it. I had to turn it in when I left there
19 and came here. But, yeah, I think that we should have gas masks.
20 I think it should just be standard issue for everybody.

21 Q. What's your experience with other hazardous materials
22 incidences if it's not the first time you've been called upon to
23 respond to an incident like this?

24 A. This is definitely the most severe thing I've ever
25 responded to. I worked at Johnson Matthey before I ever became a

1 cop and I was around chemicals and stuff there. They would send
2 us to fires and stuff like that to see -- to get people out. And
3 one time I went to -- one of their kettles was too hot and the
4 stuff was, like, steaming, whatever it was. And the same thing.
5 Like, they didn't have respirators or anything there. The actual
6 fire department did, their emergency response people. But, I
7 mean, I got sent down that way and I kept telling the woman that
8 was in charge of security that when I -- I could see through the
9 door and all I could see was steam. And she kept telling me to go
10 in there. And I finally had one of the guys from their emergency
11 response team tell me, just wait; I'm going to get my CV mask
12 thing and I'm going to go in. So I didn't have to go in. And he
13 came out and said that it was just steam coming from a kettle,
14 that whatever they were doing they put it up too hot.

15 Q. Is this when you were on the police department you had
16 to do this?

17 A. That was security for Johnson Matthey.

18 Q. Okay.

19 A. And I left there and went into the Police Academy.

20 Q. And during your tenure here at the Paulsboro Police
21 Department have you had to respond to other hazardous materials
22 emergencies?

23 A. Only a call out and inspected -- they went into a back
24 room and it was full of, like, a cloud and they didn't -- they
25 came out as a fire. They had a sink in the back -- in this back

1 room. They have all these canisters of different things and they
2 had a sink down there. And our opinion, at the end of it, was
3 they were pouring stuff down the sink and there must have been a
4 reaction and it filled the room with smoke.

5 That same night there was a problem down at the coke
6 plant and they were -- they said it was steam, but I've never seen
7 a steam cloud like that. You know, the refinery is good for not
8 telling you. They'll have a release and then it's a week later
9 you get a note on your -- you know, on your door that, "Hey, we
10 had a release. We'll wash your car and if there's anything on
11 your house, we'll come out and look at it."

12 But there was this big steam cloud. And what had
13 happened was the airport called the Port Authority where I used to
14 work, the Ben Franklin Bridge, and was asking if they could see it
15 and they said yes. So then they called our county dispatch. And
16 we're going around there looking and the guy's trying to say, no,
17 no, that's not us. And I'm like, it's you; I can see it.

18 And their security guard called in there and they said,
19 just tell them it's steam. They literally said, just tell them
20 it's steam. And that stayed -- it went across, like, the river.
21 It stayed out there. It went right out to the river. I still
22 don't know if it was anything other than steam.

23 Q. Well, since the other day, since this incident occurred,
24 has your department had a post-incident briefing or discussion
25 about what was done and whether anything could have been done

1 better?

2 A. No. I mean we've had a couple briefings where they kind
3 of tell us, like, this is where we're at right now; this is what
4 we need to do. Like the other night when we evacuated people we
5 told them that they had to go. I mean, they told us that we can't
6 make them go, but we have to explain to them that if they stay
7 that they taking their life in their hands. If something happens,
8 you know, that they're liable because they stayed and we asked
9 them to leave.

10 Other than that they're just telling us what we had to
11 do. And even like last night my sergeant had gone over to
12 Clarksboro to where they're -- I guess the incident command's over
13 there now. And when he came back he said, they're going to start
14 pumping this stuff out of the tank; they're supposed to start
15 tonight. And he explained what they're going to do. He said, if
16 it fills the tanker that they have to put the stuff in and then
17 they were pulling up creek water, and the diver's going to have to
18 go down there and see what the damage is.

19 He said, the whole time they're doing this they told me
20 that there's a 5% chance that there could be an explosion. And if
21 there's an explosion everyone's going to get a reverse 911 phone
22 call telling them to stay sheltered, stay in the house. And then
23 he said, the crane didn't even leave New York yet, and when it
24 gets here and they figure out a way that they can move them or
25 which ones to move. And what they're going to do, he said, they

1 can't be drained because of how they're sitting, they will explode
2 if they try and drain them. He said, they have to be picked up
3 and put somewhere. He said, I don't know if they're going to put
4 them on the barge or if they're going to put it the other side of
5 the track, whatever. But he said if they drop one -- he said if
6 they drop one, it will explode and they said the shrapnel will hit
7 the airport. And they said it's -- he said, basically, it's,
8 like, we're done. And that's what I was told last night. I left
9 at 7:00 a.m. and I come back tonight for my fifth night in a row.

10 Q. What I have just thought of that you could do for me, do
11 you know the radio numbers of all your colleagues that were
12 on-scene?

13 A. Yes.

14 Q. Could you give me a list of them?

15 A. Sure. Rodney Richards, 218; Jennifer Zubec, 210; I'm
16 217; Sergeant Donald Grey is 206; Sergeant Chris Gilcrest is 205;
17 Tom -- Captain Marino is 202; and Chief Chris Wachter is 201. We
18 did have other people respond.

19 We did have other people respond. They must've called
20 them from home. Sergeant Kenny Ridinger (ph.) is 214. It's Ken
21 Ridinger, Jr. Officer Ky Belvin -- Stephen Belvin, but he goes by
22 Ky, his number is 212.

23 Q. I'm sorry. What was his last name?

24 A. Belvin, B-e-l-v-i-n. I'm trying to think if anybody
25 else responded early. They, like, called in.

1 Q. Yeah. If I get a copy of the radio traffic, you all --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- indicate using these numbers?

4 A. Um-hum. They -- as soon as, like, Rodney put it out
5 that it was really bad, they moved everybody onto another zone.
6 They kept us on our zone and they moved everybody onto another
7 zone, you know, so they wouldn't be calling out car stops and
8 stuff while we're in the middle. They said, if you are not
9 helping District 2, you need to go to Channel -- 25, I think it
10 was.

11 So all you're going to hear on there is -- I mean, there
12 is out-of-town officers. I don't know any of their badge numbers.
13 I know a couple of them personally, like I know their names, but
14 -- I mean I use -- I'm even saying on there, I'm sending a Mantua
15 cop there, because I don't know who they are and I don't know
16 their number, but I want -- you know, when they'd say, can you
17 send somebody to whatever, and I would say, okay, out of your four
18 who wants to do this, give them this direction. And then I would
19 say, I'm sending a Mantua sergeant there; I'm sending a, you know,
20 Glassboro cop there.

21 Q. And what other agencies assisted during the early phase?

22 A. Our neighboring East Greenwich. Then there's a regular
23 Greenwich. We call it Gibbstown. It's the same thing, but the
24 police department is, like, Greenwich Township. I believe that I
25 saw a West Stafford before I made it over to the fire hall.

1 Q. West?

2 A. West Stafford. They're another one -- they're on the
3 other side of the Blue Bridge, that way. I saw Glassboro, Monroe,
4 Deptford, the Sheriff's Department. I know the one girl -- there
5 was a girl and a guy that showed up in plainclothes, and the one
6 girl I know works for the Warrants Unit up at the Prosecutor's, so
7 I think it's the Sheriff's Department. They're called the Warrant
8 Unit. And they were together, so I am under the assumption that
9 they work together.

10 Q. And these are all police agencies?

11 A. Yes. Logan Township. The guys from the ER -- the
12 Emergency Response Team were (indiscernible), and I only saw three
13 of them. I don't know how many ended up coming here, but I only
14 saw three of them and one was from Logan. I think Pittman might
15 have been here, too.

16 Q. These are fire departments?

17 A. Yes. Well, these are police officers.

18 Q. Oh, police. And they have Hazmat Unit?

19 A. Yeah. Well, the ERT team from, I believe, the Sheriff's
20 Department, like up at the county, they're a part of a unit up
21 there. And the one that showed up -- there was one from Logan.
22 His name was Kennedy. And one from East Greenwich. He -- I
23 believe there was one from East Greenwich, too. And the State
24 Police, I believe, came up. I know they helped block off, like,
25 the 295.

1 And then, like, the DOT guy showed up and said, what do
2 you -- you know, what can I do; how can I help you? And I told
3 him, you could put up barricades at the -- letting people off of
4 295 at 18 and 19. And then some time went by and they took those
5 barricades down. They told them they could take them down. And
6 they reopened Broad Street. You know, because they had Broad
7 Street completely blocked off. They were just shooin' everybody
8 out.

9 Q. And all of these agencies -- is this going to be
10 documented, normally, in the report that you all generate, the
11 assisting agencies?

12 A. Well, it can be because they're obligation when they're
13 leaving town, is when they get here to sign out on the radio, so
14 it can be determined exactly who was here.

15 Q. Okay.

16 A. Everybody.

17 Q. The CAD report would show that?

18 A. Yes. The last ride we had had 30 cops on it, so it's --
19 they're all there. If they sign out on the radio -- the only one
20 that the girl asked, she said -- is different, she was, like, did
21 Deptford ever show up? And I said yes. I said, there was two
22 Deptford cops. So I knew -- she was, like, they didn't sign out.
23 She was, like, so I didn't know if they made it or if they went
24 back home.

25 Q. Do you know anything about fire departments that

1 responded, beyond Paulsboro?

2 A. I know East Greenwich, Washington Township. I would
3 assume that -- I said East Greenwich. Greenwich Township, I would
4 assume that -- like Gibbstown, the Gibbstown Fire Department
5 showed up also. I don't know about any other ones because they --
6 I mean, they didn't come to where I was. And they're on a
7 different radio channel.

8 Q. Is there anything else you can think of that would be --

9 A. Not really. Not that I can think of.

10 Q. Do you have any questions for me?

11 A. Not really. Is what they told me last night, is that a
12 possibility, that the train cars could explode?

13 Q. The risk is always there until the hazardous materials
14 are removed. And anytime you have damaged containers there's a
15 risk. To quantify that is difficult to say.

16 A. Yeah. So would they be making us all leave if -- when
17 they go to move them? Because I live in town and I have a
18 6-year-old.

19 Q. I don't know what the final plan is, but there is an
20 expanded evacuation.

21 A. I mean, I'll stay. I don't care, but I just -- you
22 know, she's my niece that I've had for 3 years and I don't want --
23 I've protected her this long; I don't want anything to happen to
24 her.

25 Q. It will be well known, when they come to that point,

1 what the recommended distance should be. But if they run into any
2 problems, for sure they'll be monitoring --

3 Okay. Well, I appreciate your assistance in talking
4 with me today and we'll go ahead and end the interview. It's
5 11:15 a.m. Thank you.

6 (Whereupon, the interview was concluded.)

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the attached proceeding before the

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

IN THE MATTER OF: TRAIN DERAILMENT/CHEMICAL SPILL
 NOVEMBER 30, 2012
 PAULSBORO, NEW JERSEY
 Interview of Nicole Thigpen

DOCKET NUMBER: DCA-13-MR-002

PLACE: Paulsboro, New Jersey

DATE: December 2, 2012

was held according to the record, and that this is the original,
complete, true and accurate transcript which has been transcribed
to the best of my skill and ability.

Linda L. Brown
Transcriber